



(Photo by Master Sgt. Winston S. Churchill, 1st Air Cavalry Brigade)

Night moves

An AH-64D Apache helicopter sits on a maintenance ramp of Company D, 615th Aviation Support Battalion, 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, at Camp Taji, Iraq May 3.

Deployed mom fights for future of Iraqi children

By Sgt. Michael Garrett
7th MPAD

CAMP LIBERTY, Iraq - All over the United States children sleep safely in their beds. Their mothers tuck them in at night, maybe say a little prayer, and then it's off to never-never land. Those children sleep safely because their mothers have made sure there are no monsters under the bed, or no boogie men in the closet.

Another group of children sleep in their beds at night, halfway around the world in Iraq, protected, in part, by moth-

ers who are not their own. Many mothers in the military are sacrificing time away from their own children this Mother's Day to make a safer place in the world for other little ones.

"In my shop alone, there are three mothers that are spending this special day away from our children and husbands," said Sgt. 1st Class Suree Valenzuela, a senior logistician for the Division Special Troops Battalion, 1st Cavalry Division.

But knowing that she is missing Mother's Day to help the effort to bring peace to Iraqi children, makes the time spent away from her family worth it, she

said.

"I strongly believe that making this a peaceful country for all the children is worth it, because they deserve it more than anyone," said Valenzuela, a native of Waco, Texas. "Most, if not all, of the children in Iraq do not know how it would feel to have a peaceful country, and be able to play outside with their parents, family and friends without living in danger."

Even though she believes strongly in what she is here to do, nothing can total-

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There's no place like home

Spc. Karly Cooper
15th SB, Public Affairs

CAMP TAJI, Iraq - Everyday spent in Iraq means one day closer to going home. While we have Soldiers who anticipate going home to their mothers, many females are waiting for the day that they can pick back up on being mom to their children.

Major Bonnie Hartstein, brigade surgeon for the Headquarters and Headquarters company, 15th Brigade Troops Battalion, 15th Sustainment Brigade, 13th Sustainment Command (Expeditionary) practices emergency medicine as well as pediatrics.

The Rockville, Md. native, has a two year old daughter and a husband waiting patiently for her back home. There have been many firsts that she has had to miss since coming on deployment. As a way to keep in close connection with her loved ones,



(Courtesy photo)

Maj. Bonnie Hartstein, brigade surgeon for HHC, 15th BTB, 15th SB, 13th SC (E), holds her two year daughter Jacqueline Shweiki. The military mother has sacrificed time watching her child grow by being part of OIF.

she attempts to do a video conference once a week.

"On Mother's Day we will talk through the computer as we normally do hopefully we can video conference. We try to video conference a few times a week if possible it keeps us close. I sing songs and we do the hand

motions together," she said.

Using a web cam helps close the vast distance between the family and creates a sense of normalcy, in turn strengthening the mother child bond. Though she is missing out on some key parts of her daughter's life, one thing rings true: motherhood lasts a lifetime

and deployment is temporary.

"There are several other moms here, we talk about our children often. Mother's Day will be hard, but everyday away from your child is hard; especially birthdays and holidays. My daughter's second birthday is in July and I am really sad about missing it," said Hartstein. sMothers Day is also way to honor her mother and sister. Her mother often travels across the country to visit them in San Antonio, Texas, laden with age appropriate toys for hours in playful learning.

"Everyday I get a letter and a photo of my two year old daughter from my mother-in-law, capturing her eating a new food, or putting on her shoes or something about her day," she said.

According to Hartstein, motherhood is the greatest gift. "My family is wonderful, the way they love Jacqueline; relishing her every word, activity and expression as I would, then tire-

Arabic Phrase of the Day

hawa

Defined:
air

Iraq 3-Day Weather Report



Today

High: 98
Low: 77



Tomorrow

High: 100
Low: 79



Monday

High: 100
Low: 78

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Mom sacrifices for her children

Mom

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ly take away a mother's feeling that she is missing a special part of her children's lives. "Right now, it is baseball season, and just this past Saturday, Fabian, my oldest, pitched a no-hitter in the first game," Valenzuela said. "And on the first pitch of the game, he hit an in-field home run. That is so exciting and I am so sorry that I missed it."

But, Fabian isn't the only one racking up stats on the diamond that can make mom proud.

"For Xavier, my youngest, he pitched his first game ever. He did so well and when he told me about the game on the phone, he was so excited," Valenzuela recalled. "He said, 'Mom, I struck five people out, threw six people out and caught a couple of pop-fly balls!' I told him that he was awesome, and that I was so proud of him."

In addition to being able to talk on the phone, Valenzuela is able to stay in contact with her family through instant messengers and webcams.

"I have internet in my room here in Iraq and every morning is my time," she said. "I always look forward to chatting with them and seeing them through (the) webcam, it makes my day so much brighter."

The 15-year Army veteran said she wishes all deployed mothers could be able to talk to their children on Mother's Day without inter-



(Courtesy photo)

Sgt. 1st Class Suree Valenzuela, a senior logistician for the Division Special Troops Battalion, 1st Cavalry Division spends the last moments at Fort Hood with her sons, Fabian (right), age 12, and Xavier, age 9, before her deployment last October. Valenzuela, a 15-year Army veteran, is spending her second Mother's Day in Iraq, but said the prospect of making a safer future for her family makes it worthwhile.

ruption. When a face to face meeting isn't possible, she said a video teleconference is the next best thing.

"Since we cannot be able to actually visit in person, we could still be able to cherish laughter, smiling faces and stories that we could cherish for the rest of our lives, knowing where we are, and in the circumstances that we cannot just get on a plane and go home," Valenzuela said.

But the children in Iraq are not the only ones Valenzuela works for - there are two very good reasons liv-

ing with her husband of nearly 13 years, Mario, back at Fort Hood.

"My children come first in my life, and I would do anything in the world for them that I possibly could to make them happy," she said. "With me over here fighting this Global War on Terrorism, if that is what it takes, for me to be away from them, so that they do not have to be faced with it, then I am glad that I am here."

Well into her second tour in Iraq, Valenzuela said this Mother's Day reinforces the

reasons she is a part of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

"All mothers, regardless of where they are from, should be able to spend precious time with their children without fear or danger," she said. "The love between mother and children is unconditional and no one could ever take that away."

Hopefully, when Valenzuela has long been gone from this country, young children here will be able to sleep peacefully at night, knowing there are no more boogie men in the streets of Iraq.

Mother's Day Edition

Soccer Moms, little league cheerleaders hailed

CAMP LIBERTY, Iraq - The "coach-pitch" league run by the Killeen Parks and Recreation Division wraps up this weekend, meaning my wife only has one son, instead of two, to wheel around town to practices and games.

Unusually wet weather in central Texas this spring washed away most of the coach-pitch games for 5 and 6-year-old sluggers, a situation which was fine with my youngest son, Shane, who seemed more intent this baseball season on hanging out with a new "girlfriend" at my oldest son's practices and games.

Mom had to bring extra sweets to practices, so Shane could share with his newfound sweetie.

Some military Moms are serving over here, and can only dream about loading mini-vans with kids and heading to the ball park to take in a little league game. The vast majority, though, are on the home front doing their best to play both roles - Mom and Dad.

Moms are the chauffeurs, chefs, counselors, care-givers and caretakers of our children's lives. When I'm around, my wife has three "boys" to contend with, as if two isn't enough.

So, before talking smack about sports, I tip my hat to the hardest working folks I know - military Moms.

Clemens a Yankee

As predicted months ago, Roger Clemens took some more of George Steinbrenner's money to try and turn around the fortunes of the New York Yankees. While my fellow columnist, Pfc. Benjamin Gable, saw the "Rocket" going back to Boston for old times sake (and because they are the current front-runners in the race to the pennant), I made the predic-

Trigger Pull

**Master Sgt.
Dave Larsen**



tion of Clemens' return to Big Apple even before Alex Rodriguez started banging home runs at a near-record rate and the team's starting rotation got lit up like a Christmas tree.

Like his stints with his hometown Houston Astros, Clemens is looking for two things - cash and a challenge - and not necessarily in that order. Unlike his time in Houston, where he held National League hitters in check in nearly every outing yet still only managed a pedestrian win-loss record due to lack of offensive support, these Yankee hitters are good, top to bottom.

Back in pinstripes, barring a physical breakdown at age 44, Clemens will ring up a double-digit victory total, and could raise the Yankee play-off hopes from the ashes. He'd better.

If he wins 10 games, Steinbrenner is paying him about \$2 million per victory.

Milwaukee Miracle

If you know who Richie Weeks, J.J. Hardy, Prince Fielder and Tony Graffanino are, you must be a Milwaukee Brewers fan.

They make up the starting infield of the team with the best record in baseball (at the time of this column).

The Brew Crew just completed a 10-game home stand against the defending champion St. Louis

Cardinals, the Pittsburgh Pirates and the lowly Washington Nationals. The end result?

Milwaukee went 9-1 and padded their lead in the surprisingly weak NL Central Division. At press time, they were the only team in their division with a winning record.

The Brewers are winning with clutch hitting by a very young lineup, plus outstanding pitching from free agent acquisition Jeff Suppan, Ben Sheets, Chris Capuano and their closer, Francisco Cordero who leads the majors with 15 saves.

Their 24-10 start is the best ever for the franchise, which relocated to Milwaukee in the spring of 1970 after one dismal season as the hapless Seattle Pilots. I turned nine that spring, when I became a member of the 'True Blue Brew Crew' fan club.

Milwaukee has been to one World Series, and lost, in 1982. I was stationed at Fort Shafter, Hawaii at the time.

I remember it well. It's the year I stopped betting on sports because I lost a paycheck on that seven-game series.

While I am ever so pleased with the play of my hometown team, there's a little voice in the back of my mind whispering, "It's early. It's too early."

I know, nobody follows the standings until after the All-Star break. I've got that. But it will take a major collapse or string of losses for the Brewers to slide too far in the standings over the next few months.

It's still spring - and in Milwaukee, and for at least one Brewer fan in Baghdad - hope springs eternal.